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ABSTRACT

This study examined the procedural changes that high school special education teachers make in their transition from traditional scheduling to block scheduling. Also, teachers' perceptions of the effect of block scheduling on the literacy skills of secondary students with special needs was examined. Teachers at a national special education conference and a random sample of special education teachers in Missouri were surveyed concerning their perceptions and experiences with traditional and block scheduling. Analysis of the 102 returned surveys found: (1) most schools had been participating in block scheduling for at least two years with one to two years of prior planning common among them; (2) 50 percent of teachers believed that block scheduling had a positive effect on their students' literacy skills; (3) most teachers reported that block scheduling allowed for more support services than the traditional schedule; (4) over half reported changes in curriculum and instruction, such as a greater variety of classes and activities; (5) 36 percent of teachers reported changes in special education paperwork; (6) respondents identified advantages (such as more planning time) and disadvantages (limits of students' attention spans) of block scheduling; and (7) 64 percent of teachers preferred the block schedule. The survey is appended. (Contains 30 references.) (DB)

CHANGES SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS MAKE IN THE TRANSITION FROM TRADITIONAL SCHEDULING TO BLOCK SCHEDULING

A Seminar Paper

Presented to Graduate Faculty

Department of Reading and Special Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Masters of Science in Education – Reading

By

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Block scheduling cannot add more minutes in a day, but perhaps it can improve the educational experience of American youth toward becoming literate participants in society. Experts such as Canady and Rettig (1995) state that block scheduling has created a better school climate, provided varying learning time, and improved the quality of learning time. Curriculum and instruction are very powerful considerations within this quality learning time. These considerations are as important to special education as they are to regular education; therefore, a change in regular education requires a change in special programs. Special education is a unique entity of the educational system that can continue to adapt to changes through careful investigation and transition.

Each year, more school districts are changing from traditional schedules to block schedules. Special education within these school districts involves students with many handicaps who require special accommodation and modifications. Change of any kind can affect these students and their individualized programs.

Some steps can be taken in advance to insure a smooth transition from a traditional schedule to a block schedule. This descriptive study gives insight and direction into the future of special education in regards to the change from traditional scheduling to block scheduling.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the procedural changes special education teachers make in their transition from traditional scheduling to block scheduling. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do teachers perceive the literacy skills of students with special needs involved in block scheduling as compared to when they were in a traditional schedule?

2. What type of support services are being used to accommodate students with special needs before and after block scheduling is implemented?

3. How have curriculum and instruction changed since block scheduling implementation?

4. What changes are required with regard to formal special education paperwork after implementation of block scheduling?

Limitations

The subjects in this study were secondary (grades 9-12) special education teachers from school districts in the central part of the United States where block scheduling is currently being implemented. The survey distribution occurred in two phases. The first questionnaire survey was distributed to secondary special education teachers during the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Conference held in March 1998, in St. Louis, Missouri. The survey was used to determine teachers' perceptions comparing their experiences with a traditional schedule to a block schedule. It was assumed that some teachers attending the conference have had prior experience with block scheduling.

In addition to the conference survey, another distribution of the survey was conducted done through the mail. A random sample of special education teachers in Missouri currently participating in block scheduling was attained; the teachers returned their responses to the researcher.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, it was assumed that teachers truthfully and objectively completed and returned surveys.

Definition of Terms

1. Literacy skills are skills that deal with a student's ability to read, write, listen, and speak in a purposeful manner.

2. Procedural changes are changes that deal with procedures such as Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation which includes long and short term goals and objectives, specific time spent on each goal and objective, as well as minutes per week a student attends special programs. Specific accommodations and modifications are detailed, and the person implementing them is directly stated.

3. Special education teachers are teachers who work with students with documented disabilities.

4. Traditional scheduling is a daily schedule organized around six to eight periods of instruction for two semesters.

5. Block scheduling is a daily schedule organized into blocks or periods of time which are more than sixty minutes in length.

6. Cross categorical is a term used to describe a population with whom the special education teacher works such as Learning Disabled, Behavior Disordered, Educable Mentally Handicapped, Visually Impaired, and Hearing Impaired.

Summary

This study investigated the transitions secondary special education teachers make when changing from traditional scheduling to block scheduling. In addition the effect of block scheduling on the literacy skills of secondary students with special needs was examined.

CHAPTER II

Review of Related Literature

The purpose of this study was to determine the procedural changes special education teachers make in their transition from traditional scheduling to block scheduling. Block scheduling is a new term for flexible scheduling. According to Cawelti (1994), block scheduling occurs when "at least part of the daily schedule is organized into larger blocks of time (more than sixty minutes) to allow flexibility for varied instructional activities" (p. 23).

The idea of flexible scheduling can actually be traced back to before 1892. The National Education Association's Committee of Ten, early high schools and their predecessors, Latin grammar schools, and academies had flexibility within their school schedules (Gorman, 1971). Some schools offered subjects on two, three, or four-day a week schedules. From the work of the Committee of Ten, this flexibility was changed to an academic class schedule of five or six periods for each of the four high school years. In 1909 the Carnegie Foundation developed a standardized unit for measuring this structured schedule.

One hundred and twenty hours in one subject would equal one credit or "Carnegie Unit" (Canady & Rettig, 1995a). According to Gorman (1971) the class would meet five periods a week throughout the year. Additionally, Gorman (1971) stated this unit was developed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 1905 for determining eligibility for a pension fund of $10 million for college professors. In order to make this determination, definitions for a college professor, a college and a high

school had to be established. This unit established a definite separation between college and high schools.

In 1959, J. Lloyd Trump developed the flexible modular schedule (FMS) in an attempt to replace the traditional schedule with instructional sessions of varying lengths depending on the needs of the students and subject areas (Canady & Rettig, 1995a). This plan was implemented in the late 1960's and early 1970's and produced several problems. One problem was student discipline due to the 30-40% time allocation for independent study and individual tutorials. Additionally, teachers experienced difficulty applying methods and practices designed for a traditional schedule to the flexible schedule. These problems and others made FMS unpopular and short-lived.

In 1983 the National Education Commission on Excellence in Education issued several reports criticizing our nation's school system, especially secondary schools (Carroll, 1989). One of these reports, A Nation at Risk, became very well known and emphasized that our schools need to designate more time to learning (Anderson, 1994). These reports, along with declining student enrollment, limited funds, and changes in the United States' social demographics, prompted the current restructuring efforts of our schools today (Carroll, 1998). Other issues such as national goals, curriculum frameworks, new assessments, and standards for all students have drawn the attention to the issue of time (Anderson, 1994). According to Jenkins (1996), "The schedule, probably more than any other entity, controls the activities of a high school" (p. 21). Canady and Rettig (1995a) strongly emphasize, "A schedule can be viewed as a resource; it is the schedule that permits the effective utilization of people, space, time, and resources in an organization" (p. 29).

Types of Block Schedules

There are many types of block schedules with infinite variations. Some are more popular than others. The kind a school district chooses depends on the needs of the district as well as the students, teachers, and community.

Irmsher (1996) summarized several block schedules that were developed by experts Canady and Rettig. Some of the possibilities include the 4/4 semester plan that consists of four 90-minute blocks per day divided into two semesters. This means that a year-long course is completed in one semester. Another type of block schedule involves alternate days with six to eight classes extended over two days. In this plan, teachers meet with half of their students each day. There are two other plans: a two large block and three regular block plan that are divided into 60-day trimesters with a different subject taught in the large blocks each trimester. Classes that need to meet daily can be accommodated, and others in long blocks meet every other day. The six-course plan involves each class meeting in three single periods and one double class period per week. Similar to this plan is the seven-course schedule that meets three out of four days. One day is a double period and two days are single periods (Irmsher, 1996).

Strengths of Block Scheduling

Advocates of block scheduling, such as Canady and Rettig (1995b), state that block scheduling allows more effective use of school time and opportunities for a variety of teaching methods. Block scheduling decreases class size, discipline problems, and the dropout rate. Students also have the opportunity to repeat a failed course during the regular school year instead of during the summer or the next school year (Queen &

Gaskey, 1997). Additionally, block scheduling increases the number of courses available, attendance, and improves relationships between students and teachers (Canady & Rettig, 1993).

A positive school climate and improved relationships between students and teachers are among the many advantages of block scheduling according to supporters (Cawelti, 1994; O'Neil, 1995; Queen & Gaskey, 1997; Rettig & Canady, 1997; Shore, 1995). In some schools changing the school climate and controlling violence has become a major priority.

Violent crimes are being committed by students during the school day or at school-sponsored functions at a phenomenal rate. Articles cover the front pages of our newspapers constantly. These violent acts are not isolated to the urban cities or to teenagers. One Associated Press article written by Hays (1998) reported that a fourteen year old boy shot and killed a teacher and wounded another teacher and two other students. The boy and the teacher who was fatally shot did not know each other. The article concluded with a summary of three other fatal shootings within the past six months in the United States which took the lives of nine students and one teacher and wounded seven other students. Perhaps now is the time to know students, personalize education, and promote a positive learning environment – all strengths and advantages of block scheduling.

Carroll (1989) mentioned that negative effects on climate could occur if teachers continue to use traditional teaching methods designed for large group instruction in short class periods. A variety of more appropriate methods and strategies have been used with successful outcomes. Some of these methods and strategies included hands-on activities,

cooperative learning structures, and Socratic seminars (Rettig & Canady, 1997). Other approaches included brain-compatible and learning styles teaching (Fitzgerald, 1996) and the application of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory (Wyatt, 1996).

Current methods and strategies involving special education focus on inclusion. Malloy (1997) stated that, "Full inclusion as a special education strategy for equity promotes the total integration of special education students within the general education domain regardless of the severity of the disability" (p. 81). He added that the debate over full inclusion may be minimized by applying inclusion in a responsible manner.

In North Carolina a federally funded special education technical assistance project was used to examine inclusion practices more closely by setting up a Principals Task Force. This group identified several responsible inclusionary practice which included block scheduling, collaborative teaching, cooperative learning, interdisciplinary instruction, portfolios, and active learning projects (Malloy, 1997).

Another report by Rainforth (1996) discussed interdisciplinary instruction in regard to special education as involving not only the special and regular education teachers, but other support service personnel such as the speech and language teachers, occupational therapists, and school counselors. These professionals can develop "embedded skills instruction" within the regular education classroom (Rainforth, 1996 p. 2). Rainforth continued by discussing team teaching in which the support service personnel share planning and teaching responsibilities with the regular and special education teachers. Rainforth's discussion described some of the components of the service delivery model Class-Within-A-Class (CWC).

Although CWC was developed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in a pilot project at Parkhill School District in Kansas City in 1985, it has gained new attention due to the increase of school districts' implementation of block scheduling. Block scheduling is not required for CWC; however, in the beginning guidelines for CWC were established that restricted districts from simply implementing CWC. Currently, some of the restrictive guidelines for implementation of CWC have been discontinued; for example, extensive hours of teacher training and an application request for permission to implement (DESE, 1989).

CWC was developed to bridge the gap between regular education and special education for students with mild handicaps. According to John Heskett, DESE Coordinator of Special Education, research indicated that pull out programs were not as effective as once thought, especially in high schools. The regular education classroom in some cases was the least restrictive environment for students with mild handicaps (DESE, 1989).

The advantages of CWC coincide well with the variety of teaching methods encouraged in block scheduling. Regular and special education teachers work together in collaboration to teach content areas as well as strategies like notetaking and study skills. Teachers at Parkhill High School reported that all students stated in through an evaluation of the program that they benefited from the experience during the first year. After four years of implementation, some of the advantages of CWC were immediate problem solving when confusion occurred, increased students' self-esteem, and students with special needs were able to receive services without the stigma attached to the special

education labels and pull out programs (DESE, 1989). CWC lends itself well to block scheduling in addition to another teaching method, cooperative learning.

One specific type of cooperative learning is a program developed by Kagen (1992). Kagen (1992) stated:

> The role our schools must play in preparing all students for full participation in the economy and society of the twenty-first century is fundamentally different than the traditional role of schools. Along with the traditional role of providing students with basic skills and information, increasingly school must produce students capable of higher-level thinking skills, communication skills, and social skills. (p. 2:1)

The future workplace will require teamwork, cooperation, communication, and interaction for complex problem solving; thus, cooperative learning is essential. Kagen has developed the program in a series of activities which compose a lesson or framework. Cooperative learning provides an opportunity for students to learn by questioning, discussion, arguing, and sharing toward positive academic and social outcomes in an organized manner based on individual differences (Kagen, 1992).

Weaknesses of Block Scheduling

Block scheduling requires changes in curriculum, instruction, planning, and pacing; some educators consider these changes as weaknesses. Another weakness of block scheduling occurs in transferring credits from a school with a traditional class schedule to a school with a block schedule (Canady & Rettig, 1995a). Reid (1996) identified teacher stress and fatigue as a weakness especially in small school districts. Teachers in small school districts teach more classes and in some cases have more

responsibilities than teachers in larger districts. In addition to these weaknesses advanced placement exams are usually given in the spring and the advanced coursework for these exams is taken in the fall. Therefore, retention of information may cause problems (Canady & Rettig, 1995a). Retention can also be a problem for students with special needs as well as those with short attention spans.

According to several experts (Queen & Gaskey, 1997; Rettig & Canady, 1997), block scheduling provides opportunities for in-depth learning which develops higher level thinking skills and alleviates the problem of retention of material and skills. Schoenstein (1995) stated that through careful planning of the master schedule, gaps in sequential classes can be avoided which would further assist students in retaining information. Additionally, Fitzgerald (1996) contended, "The brain tends to be more interested in and pays more attention to activities that are related clearly to usefulness in .eal life" (p. 20). Other research has revealed that in order to move information from short-term memory into long-term memory, it requires time which block scheduling permits (Woolfolk, 1990). Fitzgerald defined one principle beginning-end-middle or BEM as the following, "Students learn or remember the most from the beginning and the end of any specific learning activity; they remember less from the middle of that learning activity" (p. 21). Therefore, a variety of activities and careful lesson planning can improve memory, the ability to retain, and retrieve information using documented principles and results from formal research.

Implementation

Block scheduling is not a universal solution to all the problems facing our current educational system (Canady & Rettig, 1995a; Reid, 1996; Schoenstein, 1995); however,

through careful planning implementation can occur smoothly for all students depending on the needs of the students, school, and community. According to Canady (1994) a school district needs to spend at least one full school year planning for implementation of block scheduling.

Hackman (1995) developed the following ten guidelines for implementing block scheduling:

1. Employ a systems thinking approach.
2. Secure the support of your superiors.
3. Understand the change process.
4. Involve all stakeholders.
5. Consult sources outside the school.
6. Brainstorm creative alternatives.
7. Examine the budgetary implications.
8. Plan faculty in-services.
9. Include an evaluation component.
10. Share and celebrate your successes. (pp. 24-26)

Anderson, Brozynski, and Lett (1996) identified the following objectives for scheduling with a purpose:

1. Conduct a needs assessment.
2. Form a committee at least one year prior to the change to determine what type of schedule would best suit your school.
3. Develop a tentative schedule.
4. Anticipate problems.

5. Implement the schedule.

6. Evaluate the objectives.

7. Conduct a summative evaluation at the end of the trial period (p. 25).

Cunningham and Nogle (1996) offered other keys to block scheduling. Teacher, student, and parent input and ownership are vital to making a change. There must be adequate staff development and time for planning. Opportunities to share concerns and successes are also essential as well as evaluation of student and teacher success (pp. 29-32).

Some of these lists are similar and can be helpful to schools that are considering block scheduling. Presently there is plenty of information on implementation tips for schools that have identified their need for block scheduling (Schoenstein, 1996). Unfortunately, research results dealing with the effects of block scheduling are scarce and conflicting (Bowman, 1998).

Summary

Research revealed that block scheduling has once again gained popularity in American schools (Canady & Rettig, 1995a). Additionally, information has been reviewed concerning the history, several types, strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for successful implementation of block scheduling. Perhaps through careful consideration and investigation of block scheduling, mistakes from the past will not be repeated (Canday & Rettig, 1995a).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the procedural changes special education teachers make in their transition from traditional scheduling to block scheduling.

Subjects

The identified population was secondary special education teachers teaching in the central part of the United States. Subjects were sought from participants attending the 1998 Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Conference. Additional subjects were obtained through a computer generated random selection from lists of all secondary special education teachers in Missouri school districts and Missouri schools currently participating in block scheduling.

Instrumentation and Design

The survey (see Appendix A) was designed by the investigator to determine types of support services needed for students with special needs involved in block scheduling who were not in traditional scheduling. The subjects chose items they considered to be advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling and stated changes in curriculum, instruction, and special education paperwork.

Procedure

Two distributions of the survey were conducted. The surveys were identical; however, the cover letters and procedures were different. The first survey was distributed during the CEC Conference; these are referred to as the conference distribution. The

second distribution was sent through the postal service and are referred to below as the postal distribution. All survey findings include results from both distributions.

Conference Distribution

After receiving permission from the CEC Conference Board (see Appendix B), the survey was distributed with a cover letter (see Appendix C) at the CEC conference in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 5-6, 1998. Participants were able to complete the survey on-site. A pre-addressed postage paid envelope was provided for those who chose to complete the survey at a later date and mail it within two weeks. One hundred surveys were distributed, and nineteen were returned. Because the return rate from the conference distribution was below 20%, it was necessary to distribute an additional survey.

Postal Distribution

A list of names and mailing labels of all the secondary special education teachers in the state of Missouri was made available through Southwest Missouri State University's administrative office. Additionally, a current list of Missouri schools participating in the block scheduling was made available through the researcher's administrative office.

The list of schools participating in block scheduling were assigned numbers through a computer generated, random selection of numbers. The list of special education teachers was matched to the list of the schools. Surveys were sent to one teacher from the 144 Missouri schools selected by the computer. Each survey was accompanied by a revised cover letter (see Appendix D) and a pre-addressed postage paid envelope. All responses from both distributions were anonymous and confidential.

Analysis

They survey was analyzed with the assistance of the computer facilities at Southwest Missouri State University and Dr. Michael Bell. Statistics were computed using the Statistics with Finesse System that collated the data and generated frequencies and percentages in order to obtain a descriptive analysis of the data. The findings related to this study are presented in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

Findings of the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the procedural changes special education teachers make in their transition from traditional scheduling to block scheduling. This study answered four questions: (a) How do teachers perceive the literacy skills of students with special needs involved in block scheduling as compared to when they were in a traditional schedule? (b) What type of support services are being used to accommodate students with special needs before and after block scheduling is implemented? (c) How have curriculum and instruction changed since block scheduling implementation? (d) What changes are required with regard to formal special education paperwork after implementation of block scheduling?

Presented in this chapter are the results of the teachers' responses on the survey that was developed by the researcher to determine the answers to the research questions. The survey was administered to secondary special education teachers in the state of Missouri during the spring of 1998.

The data were obtained from two distributions. The conference distribution resulted in a return rate of 19 out of 100 or 19%. The postal return rate was 83 out of 144 or 58%. There were a total of 102 valid surveys returned and 7 incomplete surveys. The incomplete surveys are not reflected in any of the following findings.

A portion of this survey asked the teachers to identify demographic professional background information. This information asked teachers to identify the following: (a) the number of years they have taught special education and regular education,

(b) state(s) in which they have taught, and (c) if they taught in a cross categorical special education program and types of special needs students included in the cross categorical program.

Presented in Tables 1 and 2 are a summary of the demographic information regarding the population of teachers who participated in this study. Table 1 reflects the majority of special education teachers had one to ten years of experience and had not taught regular education. Table 2 reflects the majority of special education teachers had primarily experienced teaching in a traditional schedule rather than a block schedule.

Table 1

Summary of Teachers Professional Background

Years of Teaching	Percent (frequency)	
	Special Education	Regular Education
Zero to Ten	44% (25)	94% (96)
Eleven to Twenty	35% (36)	3% (3)
Twenty One to Thirty	20% (20)	2% (2)
Over Thirty	1% (1)	1% (1)

Table 2

Summary of Teachers' Experiences with Alternative Schedules

Years of Teaching Within a Traditional Schedule	Percent (frequency)
Zero to Ten	50% (51)
Eleven to Twenty	33% (34)
Twenty One to Thirty	17% (17)
Over Thirty	0% (0)

Years of Teaching Within a Block Schedule	Percent (frequency)
Zero to Two	64% (65)
Three to Five	33% (32)
Six to Ten	3% (3)
Over Ten	1% (1)

Information describing the special education programs within the individual schools was obtained. The data revealed that 88% of the surveyed subjects teach in a cross categorical setting. In Table 3 specific areas within the cross categorical setting indicate the type of disability and percentages of teachers working with that population. The majority of the cross categorical population are students with learning disabilities.

Table 3

Types of Special Programs

Cross Categorical Area	Percent (frequency)
Learning Disabilities	89% (91)
Behavior Disorders	72% (73)
Educable Mentally Handicapped	76% (78)
Other	24% (24)

Another portion of this survey asked the teachers to identify their schools' block scheduling history. Teachers were asked to identify the following: (a) number of years they have taught in schools participating in traditional and block schedules; (b) number of years their individual school has participated in block scheduling, planned for the implementation of block scheduling, and type of block schedule chosen; and (c) an estimate of the number of students enrolled in their high school and how many of those students receive special services. Presented in Table 4 is a summary of the individual schools' block scheduling history. Data analysis revealed that slightly one half (55%) had participated in block scheduling for at least two years, more participants (39%) were involved in an eight block schedule, and the majority of schools had spent one to two years planning for the implementation of block scheduling.

Table 4

Summary of Schools' Block Scheduling History

Years of Participation Block Schedule	Percent (frequency)
Zero to Two	55% (56)
Three to Five	38% (39)
Six to Ten	6% (6)
Over Ten	1% (1)
Type of Block Schedule	**Percent (frequency)**
4/4	25% (25)
8	39% (40)
10	27% (28)
Other	9% (9)
Years of Planning For a Block Schedule	**Percent (frequency)**
Zero	6% (6)
One	41% (42)
Two	42% (43)
Three	10% (10)
Four	1% (1)

Additional enrollment information was obtained. The estimated average enrollment of surveyed schools was 495 students and an average of 60 of those students receive special services which is approximately 12%.

Question 1

The survey generated data to investigate the following research question: How do teachers perceive the literacy skills of students with special needs involved in block scheduling as compared to when they were in a traditional schedule? In order to answer this question, teachers were asked if they believed the literacy skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking abilities) of special needs students had been affected positively or negatively and to what extend by the implementation of block scheduling. Space was provided for teachers to state if the effect was positive or negative and briefly explain their answers.

Presented in Table 5 are the results of teacher responses. The most frequent explanations for a positive effect/improvement were more time to finish homework (written assignments, review of skills and for tests) and process information; more time for group and individual activities; and more individualized attention from regular and special education teachers. The most frequent negative effects were decrease in attention, retention, and listening; and modifications were not made for special needs students by regular education teachers. Half (50%) of the respondents believed that block scheduling positively affected the literacy skills of students with special needs. For detailed qualitative responses, see item 13 Appendix E.

Table 5

Summary of Affects on Literacy Skills

Affects on Literacy Skills	Percent (frequency)
Positive	50% (51)
Negative	9% (9)
Little or No Affect	18% (18)
No Response	24% (24)

Question II

The survey generated data to investigate the following research question: What type of support services are being used to accommodate students with special needs before and after block scheduling?

Presented in Table 6 is a summary of the support services provided. The data results concerning support services in a block schedule setting were much higher than those offered in a traditional schedule setting. This difference between percentages of support services offered in a block schedule setting and those offered in a traditional schedule setting may be due to the fact that some subjects had not been taught in a school with a traditional schedule. However, results indicate that the all support services listed on the survey have been utilized in both types of schedules.

Table 6

Summary of Support Services

Support Services Provided	Percent (frequency) Traditional	Block
Resource Room	52% (53)	92% (94)
Homework Assistance	53% (54)	95% (97)
Reading of Tests	53% (54)	93% (95)
Class-Within-A-Class	37% (38)	71% (72)
Departmentalization	34% (35)	58% (59)
Core Content Areas	36% (37)	54% (55)

Question III

The survey generated data to investigate the following research question: How have curriculum and instruction changed since block scheduling implementation? In order to answer the question teachers were asked if there were changes in curriculum and instruction and to explain the changes. Seventy-three percent of the teachers stated there were changes in curriculum and instruction. Presented in Table 7 are the most frequent responses to the open-ended question. A total of 56 teachers made specific comments concerning explanations for curriculum changes; 65 teachers made specific comments concerning explanations for instructional changes. For detailed qualitative responses, see item 9 Appendix E.

Table 7

Summary of Explanations for Changes in Curriculum and Instruction

Explanations for Changes in Curriculum	Percent (frequency)
More variety of classes	36% (20)
More variety of activities	13% (7)
Changes in curriculum guides	11% (6)
More credits requirements	9% (5)
Other comments combined	32% (18)

Explanations for Changes in Instruction	Percent (frequency)
Time for a variety of activities	66% (43)
Time for a variety of methods & strategies	17% (11)
Ability to use vocational experiences & other service delivery models	11% (7)
Other comments combined	6% (4)

Question IV

The survey generated data to investigate the following research question: What changes are required with regard to formal special education paperwork after implementation of block scheduling? In order to answer the question teachers were asked if there were changes and to briefly describe them. Changes were reported by 36% of the teachers in the form of an open-ended question. Specific explanations concerning the changes in special education paperwork were made by 21 teachers. Only the most frequent responses appear in Table 8. For detailed qualitative responses, see item 10 Appendix E.

Table 8

Summary of Explanations for Changes in Special Education Paperwork

Explanations for Changes in Special Ed Paperwork	Percent (frequency)
More paperwork due to changes & discipline problems	29% (6)
Adjustments in minutes in special ed	29% (6)
Other comments combined	43% (9)

Additional results included information concerning advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling. According to the 102 surveyed teachers items 11 and 12 on the instrument are presented in Table 9. Table 9 is a summary of teacher's views regarding advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling. Teachers were asked to check all areas they believed were advantages or disadvantages to their individual block schedules.

At least half or more teachers believe that block scheduling allows for more hands-on activities, more time to plan, more classes are offered, and students are in more regular classes. According to Malloy (1997) schools are creating opportunities for students with special needs to be included in regular education classes which is known as inclusion. Additionally, Malloy (1997) states that block scheduling promotes inclusion practices in a more responsible manner than a traditional schedule. However, inclusion can be utilized in a traditional schedule also. Therefore, the results regarding the advantage of students with special needs are receiving more opportunities in regular education classes supports the current emphasis on inclusion.

The majority of teachers who participated in the survey believe that the two most observable disadvantages of block scheduling include students' short attention spans and problems with making up work after an absence. Additionally, 49% observed retention of material as a problem, and 40% reported frequency of instruction as a problem.

Table 9

Summary of Teachers' Views Regarding Advantages and Disadvantages of Block Scheduling

Advantages	Percent (frequency) Yes
Improved academic achievement	34% (35)
More time in regular education classes	50% (51)
Fewer discipline problems	22% (22)
Improved social interaction	44% (45)
More time to plan	59% (60)
More hands-on activities	74% (77)
Time for evaluations/reevaluations	35% (36)
Ability to offer more classes	56% (57)
Disadvantages	**Percent (frequency) Yes**
Make up work after an absence	59% (60)
Students' attention spans	75% (77)
Behavior problems	43% (44)
Retention problems	48% (49)
Academic achievement	15% (15)
Problems in transferring credits	18% (18)
Frequency of instruction	40% (41)

Summary

One final question allowed teachers the opportunity to answer whether they would prefer to return to a traditional schedule or not and why. A total of 36% of the teachers confirmed that they would prefer to return to a traditional schedule, where as, 64% prefer a block schedule. For detailed qualitative responses, see item 14 Appendix E.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

Introduction

Presented in this chapter is a summary of the study, the conclusions drawn based on the data analyzed, a discussion of the findings, and recommendations for further study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the procedural changes special education teachers make in their transition from traditional scheduling to block scheduling. A survey was constructed by the researcher to identify these changes. Additional goals were to determine the effect of block scheduling on the literacy skills of students with special needs and identify advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling on special education programs. The survey consisted of three demographic questions, three regarding professional background information, and four questions concerning the individual schools' special education program, estimated high school enrollment and number of students with special needs, and block scheduling history. Other questions sought information regarding special education support services, changes in curriculum, and instruction after block scheduling implementation, special education paperwork, advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling, and the effect of block scheduling on the literacy skills of special needs students.

The subjects for this study consisted of secondary special education teachers. Some of the subjects were teachers who attended the CEC conference; however, the majority were from a random selection of all the schools currently participating in block

scheduling in the state of Missouri. The survey was analyzed with the assistance of the computer services department at Southwest Missouri State University and Dr. Michael Bell. Statistics were computed using the Statistics with Finesse System which generated percentages and frequencies.

Conclusions

Within the limitations of the population and the design of this study, the following conclusions appear to be justified:

1. The majority of teachers participating in this study have not taught regular education; therefore, the responses are primarily from a special educator's perspective. Eighty-eight percent of the teachers work in a cross categorical special education program; students with learning disabilities represent the largest portion of their population followed by students with mental retardation.

2. The majority of surveyed schools have been participating in block scheduling for at least two years. The eight block schedule is currently the most popular. One to two years of planning was necessary before implementation of block scheduling.

3. According to 50% of the surveyed teachers, the literacy skills of students with special needs have been positively affected by block scheduling.

4. The majority of the teachers reported that block scheduling provides more opportunities for support services than a traditional schedule.

5. Over half of the surveyed subjects reported changes in curriculum and instruction. Teachers stated most frequently that curriculum changes were due to more of a variety of classes and instructional changes were due to more of a variety of activities.

6. Thirty-six percent of the subjects reported changes in special education paperwork. The most frequent reason for this change was more paperwork due to the overall change from a traditional schedule to a block schedule, discipline problems, and adjustments in minutes in special services.

7. Teachers participating in this study indicated that the advantages of block scheduling included: (a) more time to plan, (b) ability to offer more classes, (c) more time for regular education classes, and (d) improved social interaction.

8. Teachers participating in this study indicated that the disadvantages of block scheduling included: (a) students' attention spans, (b) make up work after an absence, and (c) retention problems.

9. Teachers who were surveyed indicated that if they were given the opportunity to return to a traditional schedule, 36% would return to a traditional schedule and 64% indicated that they prefer a block schedule.

Discussion

The results of this survey indicate that only six percent of the secondary special education teachers have taught in regular education, and all have Missouri certification to teach special education. The survey indicated that 99% of the teachers have taught within a block schedule setting for less than ten years, and 88% of the teachers work in a cross categorical special education program comprised primarily of students with learning disabilities. As indicated by Canady and Rettig (1995a) alternative scheduling has gained popularity in the past ten years. Therefore, staff development to provide training for teachers due to change in curriculum and instruction is a critical factor for the

success of block scheduling (Hamdy & Urich, 1998). One year of planning is suggested by Canady (1994) prior to implementation of an alternative schedule; however, 53% of the surveyed schools planned for two to four years.

Although students with special needs are receiving more instruction in the regular education classroom, more support services are available with block scheduling for students with special needs. Support services specifically identified in the survey were as follows: resource room for assistance with homework and the reading of tests, Class-Within-A-Class where the special education teacher goes into the regular classroom to assist students with special needs, and departmentalization of content area classes (English, math, science, and history) which are designed strictly for students with special needs separate from the general student population. The survey results indicated that teachers utilized all of the support services mentioned above more in block scheduling than in traditional scheduling.

Fifty percent of the teachers believe that block scheduling has had a positive effect on the literacy skills of students with special needs. According to Rettig and Canady (1997) there is a shortage of data to support the effect of block scheduling on student achievement; however, several Canadian studies point out that students learn less in block scheduling by their performance on multiple choice tests in science and math. As indicated by Bowman (1998) there is still very little evidence available concerning the effectiveness of block scheduling that is based on research.

The survey results (in frequency order) pointed to general advantages of block scheduling as follows: more time to plan, ability to offer more classes, more time for regular education classes, and improved social interaction. These advantages are

supported by Canady and Rettig (1993 & 1997), Cawelti (1994), O'Neil (1995), Queen and Gaskey (1997), and Shore (1995). This was also indicated in the results of a study conducted in southern Florida by Hamdy and Urich (1998).

The surveyed teachers agreed (in frequency order) with disadvantages in the specific areas of students' attention spans, make up work after an absence, and problems with retention of information. Evidence of these disadvantages were found in the research as instructional issues (Rettig & Canady, 1997). In spite of disadvantages and changes, the majority of surveyed secondary special education teachers in Missouri prefer block scheduling over traditional scheduling. This is congruent with the southern Florida teachers (Hamdy & Urich, 1998).

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations for future research are made:

1. Regular and special education teachers need to be better prepared to educate students with special needs in the regular education setting. This can be accomplished by providing more education in the teacher education programs during college.

2. School districts need to offer more in-service programs to help teachers become familiar with new instructional strategies that can be utilized during block scheduling.

3. Regular and special education teachers and support personnel who are involved in block scheduling, should meet on a regular basis to discuss activities and strategies to accommodate students with special needs.

4. The sample for this investigation was limited to Missouri secondary special education teachers. It is recommended that future studies include a larger population of school districts from other states.

5. The sample for this investigation was limited to secondary teachers. It is recommended that a study be conducted to include elementary and middle school teachers.

6. It is recommended that future research be directed toward the gathering of hard data to identify the effects of block scheduling on students in the regular education classrooms with and without special needs.

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APPENDIX A

SECONDARY BLOCK SCHEDULING SURVEY

Secondary Block Scheduling Survey

For the purpose of this survey terms have been defined as follows:

traditional schedule is a daily schedule of six to eight class periods of instruction;

block schedule is a daily schedule of blocks of time of more than sixty minutes of instruction.

Please answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. Including this school year, how many years have you taught special education? _____ &/or regular education? _____

2. What state do you teach in? _____

3. Are you currently teaching in a cross categorical special education program? _____
If yes, circle the categories that apply. LD/BD/EMH or other ____

4. Of those years in question 1, how many have been in a traditional schedule? _____ How many have been in a block schedule? _____

5. How many years has your school been participating in block scheduling? _____ What type of block schedule has your school implemented? 4/4 8 10 or other _____

6. How many years did your school plan for implementation of block scheduling? _____

7. Estimate how many students are currently enrolled in your high school? _____ How many of these students receive special services? _____

8. Please check support services offered in your school to accommodate students with special needs during a traditional schedule and block schedule.

Support Service	Traditional Schedule	Block Schedule
Resource room	_____	_____
assistance with homework	_____	_____
reading of tests	_____	_____
Class Within a Class	_____	_____
Departmentalization	_____	_____
Core Content Areas	_____	_____
Other(s) - please list and how many years have these classes been offered?		

Feel free to add any other services you think could be helpful if a block schedule is in place.

9. Have there been changes in curriculum and instruction since the implementation of block scheduling has occurred? _____
If yes, please explain changes in the space provided.

Curriculum

Instruction

10. Have there been changes in special education paperwork since the implementation of block scheduling? _____
If yes, please explain changes in the space provided.

11. Which of the following are advantages to block scheduling with regard to special education? (Check all that apply)

_____ Improved academic achievement
_____ More time in regular education classes
_____ Fewer discipline problems
_____ Improved social interaction with peers and teachers
_____ More time to plan
_____ Time for hands-on activities in departmentalized programs
_____ More time for evaluations and reevaluations
_____ Ability to offer more classes

Feel free to add any other advantages you have experienced.

12. Which of the following are disadvantages to block scheduling with regard to special education? (Check all that apply)

_____ Make up work after an absence
_____ Students' attention span
_____ Behavior problems
_____ Problems retaining information
_____ Academic achievement
_____ Problems in transferring credits
_____ Frequency of instruction

Feel free to add any other disadvantages you have experienced.

13. To what extent have the literacy skills (reading, writing, listening, & speaking abilities) of special needs students been affected positively or negatively by implementation of block scheduling?

14. Would you go back to traditional scheduling if given the opportunity? _____ Why or Why not?

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER TO

THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN BOARD

Southwest Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

1617 West Third Street
Sedalia, Missouri 65301
January 30, 1998

The Council for Exceptional Children Board
Bill Hoffman President
3 Huntsman Court
Lake St. Louis, Missouri 63367

Dear Council for Exceptional Children Board:

I am a teacher at Warsaw R-IX School District. I teach secondary special education and sixth grade reading in the middle school. Also I am a graduate student working to complete my Master's of Science in Education in Reading at Southwest Missouri State University. In order to complete my degree I am conducting a descriptive study on block scheduling and special needs students with a reading component.

Basically this study examines changes secondary special educators make in the transition from traditional scheduling to block scheduling and observable improvements in literacy skills of special needs students. I have developed a survey to attain the necessary data to complete my study.

I am writing to request permission to distribute the survey I have developed at the upcoming CEC Conference in St. Louis. I will be completely responsible for conducting the distribution and need only a small space at the registration table to hand out the survey and a place for teachers to return the survey. I will provide self-addressed stamped envelopes for those who prefer to mail it back to me. These surveys are completely confidential and responses of teachers will be anonymous. I will send a copy of my survey as soon as it has been completely approved.

Thank you for your time in considering my request. Also for further verification of this study feel free to contact my instructor Dr. Sarah Nixon-Ponder by telephone at (417)836-4812.

Sincerely,

Tammie Vermillion
Master's Candidate

Reading & Special Education
901 South National Avenue Springfield, Missouri 65804-0095 (417) 836-6769 Fax: (417) 836-4884

APPENDIX C

COVER LETTER TO EDUCATORS – CONFERENCE DISTRIBUTION

Southwest Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

1617 West Third Street
Sedalia, Missouri 65301
March 6-7, 1998

Dear Secondary Special Educator:

I am a teacher at Warsaw R-IX School District. I teach secondary special education and sixth grade reading in the middle school. Also I am a graduate student working to complete my Master's of Science in Education in Reading at Southwest Missouri State University. In order to complete my degree I am conducting a descriptive study on block scheduling and special needs students with a reading component.

Basically this study examines changes secondary special educators make in the transition from traditional scheduling to block scheduling and observable improvements in literacy skills of special needs students. I have developed a survey to attain the necessary data to complete my study.

I am distributing the survey I have developed at this conference and for your convenience there will be a box labeled Block Schedule Survey at the registration table for you to return the survey. I will provide self-addressed stamped envelopes for those who prefer to mail it back to me. These surveys are completely confidential and your responses will be anonymous.

I truly appreciate your time and contributions.

Sincerely,

Tammie Vermillion
Master's Candidate

Reading & Special Education
901 South National Avenue Springfield, Missouri 65804-0095 (417) 836-6769 Fax: (417) 836-4884

APPENDIX D

COVER LETTER TO EDUCATORS – POSTAL DISTRIBUTION

Southwest Missouri State
U N I V E R S I T Y

1617 West Third Street
Sedalia, Missouri 65301
March 30, 1998

Dear Secondary Special Educator:

I am a teacher at Warsaw R-IX School District. I teach secondary special education and sixth grade reading in the middle school. Also I am a graduate student working to complete my Master's of Science in Education in Reading at Southwest Missouri State University. In order to complete my degree I am conducting a descriptive study on block scheduling and special needs students with a reading component.

Basically this study examines changes secondary special educators make in the transition from traditional scheduling to block scheduling and observable improvements in literacy skills of special needs students. I have developed a survey to attain the necessary data to complete my study.

I am distributing this survey to a random sampling of secondary special education teachers throughout Missouri who are currently teaching in schools that are implementing block schedules. The distribution is through the mail which includes a cover letter, the survey, and a pre-addressed stamped envelope. My deadline is approaching quickly, so your input is needed within the next two weeks. These surveys are completely confidential and your responses will be anonymous. Also the results of can be obtained upon request.

I truly appreciate your time and contributions.

Sincerely,

Tammie Vermillion
Master's Candidate

Reading & Special Education
901 South National Avenue Springfield, Missouri 65804-0095 (417) 836-6769 Fax: (417) 836-4884

APPENDIX E

QUALITATIVE SURVEY RESPONSES

Qualitative Survey Responses

9. Changes in Curriculum and Instruction

Specific Responses for Curriculum Changes	Frequency
More of a variety & new classes	20
More variety of activities	7
Departmental curriculum guides were rewritten	6
More credits required for graduation	5
More preparation (some doubled the lesson plan)	5
Life based & specialized curriculum	3
Selection of levels of math are limited	2
Class size bigger	2
More authentic tasks	2
Interdisciplinary teaming	1
25% of the teachers have same planning time	2
Teachers don't cover as much information; less rushed	1
Integration of social & study skills into content time	1

Specific Responses for Instructional Changes	Frequency
More time for a variety of activites (hands-on, cooperative, field trips, videos, etc.)	43
Allows for variety of teaching methods & strategies	11
Able to use vocational experiences & other service delivery models (Class-Within-A-Class)	7
More diagnostic classes offered due to fewer classes appropriate for special needs students	2

9. Continued

Teachers have more time to go over material & students have more time with the teacher	2

10. Changes in Special Education Paperwork

Specific Responses for Changes in Paperwork	Frequency
More due to changes and discipline problems	6
Adjustment in time/minutes in special services	6
More monitoring and contact with regular education teachers due to modifications	2
Lesson plans for inclusion classes	2
New forms; changes in modification sheet	2
Less due to 4 classes instead of 7 & built in seminars	2
Less planning time to do paperwork	1

13. Improvement in Literacy Skills

Specific Responses for Positive Effect	Frequency
More time to finish homework, written assignments & review of skills & for tests	14
Improvement; greatly	14
More time for group & individual activities (read, write, & listen)	7
Eliminated study halls; so students can get individual attention from regular & special education teachers	6
More time for varied & intense activities	3
More instructional time & time on task	3
Better achievement in regular classroom	2

13. Continued

Improved computer skills and speaking; students aren't as bashful	1
Students able to spend longer, unbroken time periods on tasks	1

Specific Responses for Negative Effect	Frequency
Decrease in self esteem, attendance, listening, Attention, & retention	3
Classes are too long	2
Modifications are not made for special needs students	2
Increase in accepting failure	1
Absentees	1
Little or no change in literacy skills	18

14. Would You Return To A Traditional Schedule

Specific Reasons to Stay with Block	Frequency
Variety of activities/classes during periods & each day	10
More uninterrupted class time with easier transitions alleviating rushing	8
More time for planning, grading, monitoring student progress & paperwork	7
Allows for more flexibility of students & teachers; teachers aren't as complacent	5
More time for hands-on activities	4
Better rapport with students and immediate feedback	4
Fewer students & classes (4 instead of 7)	4

14. Continued

Students are better organized and have more opportunity for success	3
Block schedule is better for special education children	3
College bound students are more prepared due to similar schedule	2
Increased opportunity to work individually with students	2
Fewer passing periods; less fights & behavior problems	2
Graduation requirements keep raising; traditional schedules cannot meet these requirements	2
Advantages outweigh the disadvantages	1

Specific Reasons to Return to Traditional	Frequency
Frequency of time; need to see student everyday	11
Need shorter class periods	11
Attention span problems	7
Retention trouble	4
Behavior problems	3
Implement a different block	3
Need to increase success not failure	2
Block scheduling causes trouble in organization, memory, & ability to change gears	2
Personal preference	2
Able to cover more material in a more orderly fashion with traditional schedule	1
Regular teachers don't accommodate; students cannot keep up	1

14. Continued

Seniors have too much free time	1
Disadvantages outweigh the advantages	1

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